

LISTENING GUIDE

Antonio Vivaldi
(1678–1741)

Le Quattro Stagioni (The Four Seasons)

RV 269, 315, 293, & 297 • Composed in 1723

“La Primavera” (Spring) in E Major, RV 269

Movement I

Allegro

1. RITORNELLO – “Spring has arrived!”
2. “The birds welcome it in joyful song.”
3. RITORNELLO
4. “Sweet murmuring streams flow on the breath of the zephyrs.”
5. “Meanwhile, spring’s chosen messengers, thunder and lightning, turn the sky dark.”
6. RITORNELLO – in MINOR.
7. “Having become silent, the little birds return and sing again.”
8. RITORNELLO

Movement II

Largo

9. “On the pleasant, flowering meadow under rustling trees, the shepherd sleeps. His faithful dog is nearby.”
10. The music repeats, not quite literally.

Movement III

Allegro

11. RITORNELLO – “To the festive sound of country bagpipes, nymphs and shepherds dance under the brilliant spring sky.”
12. SOLO VIOLIN passage.
13. RITORNELLO – in MINOR at first.
14. SOLO VIOLIN passage with more elaborate ACCOMPANIMENT.
15. RITORNELLO
16. A final SOLO VIOLIN passage.
17. RITORNELLO – The shepherds and nymphs dance to a quiet finish.

“L’Estate” (Summer) in G Minor, RV 315

Movement I

Allegro non molto

1. RITORNELLO – “During the severe season of the baking sun, people and animals languish, and the pine trees are scorched.”
2. “The cuckoo begins to sing.”
3. RITORNELLO
4. “And in wonderful agreement, the dove....
5. and the goldfinch sing.”
6. “The gentle breezes of the zephyrs blow...

7. but are soon challenged by the North Wind.”
8. RITORNELLO
9. “The young shepherd cries out, frightened of the storm and his fate.”
10. The storm threatens again, bringing the movement to a powerful UNISON close.

Movement II *Adagio*

11. “He moves his weary arms about for fear of swarms of gnats and flies...”
12. and distant violent thunder and lightning.”

Movement III *Presto*

13. “Ah, his fears are all too justified, for thunder shakes the heavens, and the hailstones break the heads off the cornstalks.”
14. SOLO VIOLIN passage.
15. The storm rages on.
16. SOLO VIOLIN passage.
17. The TUTTI “thunders” in UNISON.
18. SOLO VIOLIN passages and storm music rapidly alternate bringing summer to an exciting conclusion on a UNISON G.

“L’Autunno” (Autumn) in F Major, RV 293

Movement I

Allegro

1. RITORNELLO – “The country folk celebrate the good harvest with dances and joyful songs.”
2. SOLO VIOLIN passage.
3. RITORNELLO
4. Exchange between “drunken” SOLO VIOLIN and other intoxicated individuals.
5. RITORNELLO – in MINOR.
6. More drunken bragging.
7. RITORNELLO
8. The party-goers, “having consumed much wine, begin to nod out.”
9. RITORNELLO

Movement II

Adagio molto

(HARPSICHORD IMPROVISATION)

10. “Thus, eventually everyone ceases to sing and dance to the tunes of gentleness and pleasure, and the season invites many to slumber.”

Movement III

Allegro

11. RITORNELLO – “The hunter goes forth at daybreak with horns, guns and ferocious dogs!”
12. SOLO VIOLIN plays HUNTING HORN calls.
13. RITORNELLO
14. SOLO VIOLIN – More HORN calls.
15. RITORNELLO
16. “The animal flees and the hunters follow its tracks;”
17. RITORNELLO – Hunt music and fleeing music alternate.
“Frightened by the noise of the guns and dogs, the animal tries to escape!”
18. “Exhausted from the chase, the animal is caught and dies.”
19. RITORNELLO

“L’Inverno” (Winter) in F Minor, RV 297

Movement I

Allegro non molto

1. “Shivering in the frozen snow...
2. and from the cruel blast of the biting wind.”
3. “Stamping one’s feet continuously because of the cold.”
4. Beautiful “windy” SOLO VIOLIN passage.
5. Interplay between SOLOIST and TUTTI.
6. Shivering again.
7. “And because of the excessive cold, one’s teeth chatter!”
8. The movement closes with the stamping of feet again.

Movement II

Largo

9. “Resting by the fire in peace and contentment while outside the rain moistens everything.”

Movement III

Allegro

10. "Walking (skating) on the ice."
11. "Walking cautiously at first for fear of falling."
12. "Walking more boldly...slipping and falling on the ground."
13. "Back on the ice...moving boldly."
14. "The ice cracks and breaks!"
15. "Hearing the sultry Southeast Wind through the iron gate."
16. "The North Wind and all the winds blow in conflict."
17. "But this is winter, which brings such joy!"

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